

Bill would increase the number of school counselors, social workers & school psychologists in low-income schools

Washington, DC - Representative Linda Sánchez (CA-39) introduced education legislation in Congress today to increase the number of school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists in qualified schools in low-income communities.

The Increased Student Achievement Through Increased Student Support Act, will authorize grant funding to form partnerships between higher education institutions that train these student support professionals and Local Educational Agencies (school districts) that serve low-income student populations. The legislation also creates a student loan forgiveness program for individuals who have served five or more consecutive school years as school counselors, school social workers, or school psychologists in similarly qualified low-income schools.

“Students require support in many ways, not just those directed at improving test scores,” said Rep. Linda Sánchez. “Oftentimes teachers and staff struggle to meet not only the academic needs of their students, but their social, emotional and behavioral needs as well. School counselors, psychologists, and social workers play an indispensable role in helping students achieve a bright future and should be available to all students, regardless of income.”

The legislation, which Sánchez is working to include as part of the No Child Left Behind, has been endorsed by over 20 education and mental health organizations, including the American School Counselor Association, the American Counseling Association, the School Social Work Association of America and the National Association of School Psychologists. A joint statement released by these four organizations stated, “Increasing the achievement of students from low-income homes is critical to our nation, but schools must have the proper support systems in place to ensure that teachers are not alone in this effort. This legislation provides an opportunity for schools to access the appropriately trained school-employed mental health professionals necessary to ensure that students who need the most help receive it in a timely, focused manner.”

Rep. Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY) and Rep. Jared Polis (D-CO) introduced this legislation with Rep. Sánchez (D-CA) in the U.S. House of Representatives. A companion bill was introduced in the Senate by Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and Thad Cochran (R-MS).